

Welcome to the final lesson, number ten! As previously mentioned, the search for funders is on-going. I started an accordion file and it continues to grow. How to organize them is a challenge, alphabetical, by state? I'm still not sure. You could organize them by deadlines or types of funding.

Lists get updated and new grant-makers come along. Long-standing foundations may add animal welfare to their list of "areas of interest."

You might be sitting at a concert some evening and see a list of local foundations on the back of the program—some new to you and worth a look.

You can improve your chances (to some extent) with advance research. It can save time by narrowing the candidates or at least learning as much as you can before approaching them. Grant books say you could practice the "shot-gun" approach or the narrowing down approach.

Each foundation prepares an annual tax form called a 990. They can be very lengthy, such as 150-180 pages for big foundations, but don't worry; others are only 30-45 pages. For a grant-seeker this document is very informative.

You only have to check out portions of the form, and skip through all the rest including their investment data. FYI--The IRS requires this document be made public.

No matter where or how you find a foundation originally, expect to do some further research on them before your start printing! Here are the important questions:

Is there a deadline?

What is their geographic focus?

How do they prefer to be approached, letter, application, full proposal?

Do I have a contact name or a phone number?

Does my program fit their areas of interest?

Do they mention general operating funds? (If that's what you're seeking)

Do they have an application form or a website?

When it comes to the 990 forms, the Foundation Center is one option. Go to [www.foundationcenter.org](http://www.foundationcenter.org) and locate the section called **990 Finder**. **You need not have a subscription to access this section.**

In general this is an excellent website to help you get a better understanding of foundations and how they work. Allow some time to “poke-around” at everything they offer. You can gradually absorb things. Like learning a foreign language, the grant process is an on-going learning process.

At a minimum, the 990 form can tell you the following:

Name, phone and current address (in case it differs with what you have)

Total assets (tells you if they are a large, medium or small funder)

Contributions for that year (the total amount of money they gave away)

Which non-profit groups received funding that tax year and the purpose (lets you know if your organization is similar and what projects they liked)

Guidelines for your initial approach (the 990 form has a place for this information, though not all funders fill out that section)

You can be faced with dozens of foundations options. Devise a “prospect worksheet” or some other helpful system—whatever is simple and works for you. Some grant books have sample prospect worksheets you can copy.

This is the method for you to know which foundations deserve further attention.

I sometimes give them a number ranking, such as: 4 of 10 or a 6 of 10. If my ranking is a 2 of 10, they go to the far back of the pile. I also jot down notes such as “worth an inquiry letter” or “wants a full proposal first” or “odds don’t look good” or “note the deadline of next month.”

Once you find the foundation and their 990 forms, you can cross check over multiple tax years. If you notice they funded the EXACT same six groups in 2005, 2006 and 2007, that’s a big clue that 2008 could be the same.

No one, not even seasoned grant-writing professionals can tell you with absolute certainty which foundations are the “best” funders to approach. It depends on where your particular organization is located, what you want the money for, even the size of your organization, and the date. (If you just

missed their annual deadline, obviously that funder is not the best place to start next week.)

The best you can do is research for the best match-up and make some intelligent choices.

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